

August 4, 2021

Dear Conservation Commission Members,

As discussed at our last meeting here is the link to the City of Providence education program on organic land management <https://www.providenceri.gov/sustainability/pesticidefree/>

Providence implemented their program with a \$35,000 grant from the Healthy Babies Bright Futures program <https://www.hbbf.org/> My personal opinion is that the City might want to consider joining the Healthy Babies effort, which is sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

As we move to comply with City Council Non-Toxic Resolution # 26-2017 (attached) in preparing an outreach program, I thought that it might be useful (particularly for our new members) to provide a brief timeline of the City's passage of the state's first Non-Toxic Resolution and the city's transition to Organic Land Management practices over the past few years. I have quite a bit of information, which I have summarized and provided a few relevant attachments. Below is the summary.

### **Non-Toxic Resolution**

In late 2015, I discovered that the City was spraying Roundup on all of our sidewalks, curbs, and public areas in order to kill weeds. It was the beginning of my steep learning curve about the grave environmental and health threats that synthetic toxic pesticides pose to all of us – and in particular children. I expressed my concern to city management and was told that the EPA had not banned the use of glyphosate, that it was still legal to use, and that the city would continue to use it to kill weeds because it was the most cost effective way. However, the public's concern about "Roundup" was growing.

In 2016, in conjunction with other concerned citizens, we increased our efforts to ban glyphosate and the use of all pesticides in city operations. The City required us to file a "Right to Know" request to find what other specific chemicals the City was applying to city property. Without the knowledge of the public, the city was using a number of other dangerous pesticides on the parks, sidewalks, curbs, and municipal green spaces throughout the city. Attached are the Word versions of two LTE's on the subject from May and June of 2016 (see Roundup LTE and Bifenthrin). In late Summer, after an organizational meeting at the Portsmouth Library, we founded the non-profit group Non-Toxic Portsmouth - @nontoxicportsmouth - dedicated to protecting public health and the environment in the City of Portsmouth from the dangers of pesticides. We soon began closely collaborating with our sister organization and more experienced group in the fight against pesticides, Non-Toxic Dover - @nontoxicdover . Meanwhile the city publically announced that they had stopped using Roundup. However, after receiving a response to our Right to Know request, we found out that in reality the city had just switched to another glyphosate based product called Rodeo, which is just as dangerous.

We continued to expand our educational efforts on social media, through letters to the Editor, and lobbying the City Council on the dangers of using toxic pesticides to maintain city property for solely aesthetic reasons. One of the big challenges has been that the City does not post on its website what pesticides they and their contractors are using. So in order to find out, we have had to send “Right to Know” requests to both cities to find out. I have attached a LTE from 2017 upon our discovery that the City had swapped out a glyphosate based pesticide for another pesticide that is even more harmful to humans and the environment – see the attached OpEd (NonToxicJuly.2017). Since 2017, Non Toxic Portsmouth and Non Toxic Dover, have jointly sent an annual Right to Know request to both of our cities to monitor what products are being used.

Finally, in the Fall of 2017, we were able to convince the City Council to put a Non-Toxic Resolution on the City Council agenda for consideration. The final language of the Resolution was negotiated with the City Manager’s Office. On September 18, 2017, on a decisive 7-1 vote, the City of Portsmouth became the first municipality in New Hampshire to ban the use for pesticides to maintain city property. Further, in February of 2018, with the combined efforts of Non Toxic Portsmouth and Non Toxic Dover, the City of Dover also passed a policy to ban the use of pesticides on public property. Portsmouth and Dover became the first two municipalities in the State to ban pesticides on public property. While we remain the only two, we have received a number of inquiries from other communities – mostly from Conservation Commissions - about joining our efforts.

In August of 2017, the city stopped using Reward herbicide (Diquat dibromide) and replaced it with the organic based but very expensive Finalsan herbicide to kill sidewalk weeds. Finalsan does not meet the NOFA standards for organic land management, and if misused can be a danger to aquatic resources – but is much less harmful than Reward. The city continued to use Finalsan for all of the 2018 season, but discontinued its use for 2019 on the basis of cost, and has since stopped spraying herbicide on sidewalks and streets. In over 250 European cities, they use large steam machines to both control weeds, and to sanitize sidewalks, which we have advocated for here.

### **The City’s Transition to Organic Land Management**

In support of the Resolution’s requirement for a public outreach program, Non Toxic Portsmouth and Non Toxic Dover organized a well-attended educational program on organic land care on October 23, 2017, headlined by the top expert in the country, Chip Osbourne of Osbourne Organics. We were joined in the effort by the CLF and Eldridge Lumber’s organic specialist (see attached program, Nontoxic 10.23). However, since the 2017 passage of the Resolution, little if any progress has been made on the requirement that; “City staff will consult with the City’s Conservation Commission to prepare an outreach program.....”

A very important aspect of the September 18, 2017 Non Toxic Resolution was the requirement that “Staff shall also prepare an organic weed control program and implementation budget for City Council consideration as part of its Fiscal Year 2019 budget.” We lobbied without success to have a steam weeding machine and a commercial grade aerator included in the FY 2019 budget.

In late 2018, Non Toxic Portsmouth and Non Toxic Dover, applied for and received grants from Stonyfield Yogurt to fund a three year organic pilot project for a playing field in each city. We were 2 of only 10 cities chosen nationally. The grants covered the cost of materials, training of staff in organic land management, and a plan overseen by Osborne Organics and the national environmental group Beyond Pesticides. The city choose the Alumni-Wentworth Field, on Granite St. for its pilot project. This is the third year of the program and I urge you to see the field if you have not yet had the chance. The field is a high use field – it just went through a full season of softball and is used for lacrosse and soccer practices. Walk on it and check out the turf. Any weeds in the infield have been mechanically removed. This is what an organically maintained playing field should look like. Please see <https://www.stonyfield.com/playfree/alumni-field-portsmouth-nh>

The grant also included \$5,000 for organic related equipment purchases. Upon the recommendation of a newly hired arborist with a background in organic land management, the Public Works Department chose to purchase a tea composting machine, which is now used extensively to fertilize lawns and gardens on municipal property. Additionally, the grant provided training funds for organic land management. Today the Public Works Department has 4 personnel who have earned their AOLCP accreditation from NOFA over the last 3 years.

The best news is that the city no longer uses toxic pesticides to maintain property. However, more support is needed to expand the city’s progress in organic land management. A commercial grade deep tine aerator is badly needed. The cost, according to Peter Rice, is about \$42,000. The city should include in its Capital Plan the \$200,000 cost (less than the cost of a single trash truck) for a steam machine to control weeds and to sanitize the sidewalks. Additionally, right now the School Department and the Municipal government maintain their fields independently, and with different standards. All field and green space maintenance should be the responsibility of one department – in this case Public Works.

We need to make organic land care and the elimination of toxic pesticides a major priority in Portsmouth for the health of our kids, residents, and pets.

Regards,

Ted Jankowski  
AOLCP